

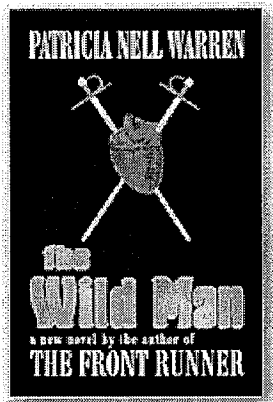
EXHIBIT 5, CONT.

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THE WILD MAN - Excerpt



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Chapter One

My second bull of the afternoon fell over on his side, with my sword in his heart. He was finished, and so was I.

By then I'd killed almost 500 bulls in my 9-year career. Yet I remember that moment and that bull, because I was in such a shocking state of mind. He was an ugly bull, black and white pinto, with horns like little bananas. My sword-hilt cast a shadow across his bloody shoulders. As the light died in his eyes, his legs still vibrated, and his tail flailed as he voided helplessly, the runny shit of death. The wet tongue trailed from his wet muzzle, caked with sand.

It had been a quick, clean kill — my best since the goring in S&Mac255;cija. The curving blade had cut the aorta behind his heart. No blood showed at his mouth, but a hot spurt had jetted up the blade, bathing the inside of my sleeve. That was the way it was supposed to happen — red spurt into satin sleeve, the perfect symbol of making love. It was what my fans expected of me... what I demanded of myself.

Now, only now, the fierce trembling hit me.

It was that last Sunday in May 1969 on the north coast of Spain. Springtime coolness should have refreshed me and given me strength — sea breezes and mountain airs, there in the green Spain. Dry Spain was my motherland — the central plateau, where fields already fried in African breezes at that time of year. But today the cool weather hadn't helped at all. My satin suit of lights weighed on me like a suit of armor,

and sweat stung my eyes now. I blinked, trying to see.

"Two ears!" "No, the tail!" "The tail!" Fans were arguing about what trophies I should get.

The worst thing was my bad leg — it felt nerveless and spastic, and hurt like the devil. But I didn't dare show weakness. Each step I'd made in front of the bull had been fiercely willed. As I pulled my sword out of the carcass, the light weapon felt heavy as destiny. I didn't dare wipe my face on my sleeve. Standing there alone, with everybody's fluttering handkerchiefs dizzying me, the rich folks on the shady side of the bullring and poorer folks on the sunny side, I noticed that my hand was empty. My

sword-man had taken the weapon from my hand. Was time playing tricks on me?

I felt alone, and naked.

A torero does what he does while dressed from head to foot in heavy silk and embroidery. In a world inured to nude celebrities and pornography, I have my way with a crowd without even opening my fly. At most, the crowd gets to see a bit of skin through torn clothes, if the bull catches me. They may see me vulnerable — wounded, in shock, carried to the infirmary in other men's arms. At worst they see the occasional matador dead in a black coffin and the traditional blaze of candles. But naked? Never. Juan Belmonte* had scandalized everybody by posing nude for a sculptor, back in the bad old days of the Second Republic, but few cared to remember he'd done that. So why did I feel so naked that day?

Now, up in the officials' balcony, the mayor was signaling for trophies. The grinning ringman went to work with his knife, and held the severed things in front of me. Two ears and the tail.

Pull yourself together, Antonio, I told myself.

From bleachers and balconies of the bullring, the crowd's roar poured over me, suffocating me like a sandstorm. It was their first afternoon of bulls that year, and they were eager for excitement. For once, they were giving me the crazy roar, like they'd done for Manolo Benítez on the previous bull. My sensational colleague from Córdoba had cut two ears and tail too, and the crowd had gone mad. Now they had gone even crazier for me.

"Give him the whole bull," some guy was screaming.

Two ears and the tail, man. It might rate a few seconds on the TV news. The EFE wire service would say Antonio Escudero also triumphed in smaller type, under the big headline EL CORDOBS&Mac255;S TRIUMPHED IN SANTANDER. God knows I needed publicity. My comeback had fallen flat so far. The going in S&Mac255;cija 13 months ago had taken more out of me than I'd thought. The comeback started at JaEn — I was terrible

there. Then the Sevilla fair, where I got one ear. Sevilla fans were exacting — one ear was a major concession. Then the San Isidro fair in Madrid last week, where I felt frozen and couldn't deliver. The Madrid fans whistled and threw beer bottles at me. Every afternoon, I was as depressed and tired as now.

And there were questions haunting me. How long would the bad leg obey me? Could I stop the downdrift of my career? My profession was my lover, my Muse. I was losing my one passion and inspiration — the only thing that I had ever been able to possess and adore completely.

Step forward, leg.

That's it. Step again.

Today, from somewhere, not even Earth but from somewhere in the universe, I'd pulled the old bravo rage back into my heart, and willed the leg to work. Desperate and angry, facing a slow bull with little banana horns that would allow me to do some filigrees, I gave the crowd everything. The stripper takes off her clothes, but the torero takes off his safety margin. I had stood a

few centimeters from the horn, and held the little cloth behind me, and provoked the bull with my thigh. Only at the last second, as the pinto monster lurched into motion, did I move the cloth forward to catch his eye and pull that banana past my thigh, letting the blood on his shoulders rub off on my fly. Even the bananas can kill you. Like the movie stunt-man, the torero must calculate his chances intelligently. Chaos always lurks in every bull.

How much longer could I do this? I was almost 30, a full matador for nine years. Already too old and too rich to feel the hunger for bulls any longer. Other hungers gnawed me now. The hunger to stay off the horn, for sure. The hunger to retire, and spend all my time improving my land. The hunger to enrich my life. To know the world better — to travel more outside of Spain. To see more of what people were doing out there in the great world.

And to feed the big hunger. That one.

Now I threw back my head and forced myself to stand proud and wild-looking. To look very torero. Wasn't that why they wanted me here in the ring? To be the symbol for all those ecstatic, shouting men? To be the dream for the women? But I wasn't in the ring for other people...was I? No. I was here for myself. I was here because of the hunger. One of the hungers, anyway. The craving for a destiny of my own — a life of risk and freedom, instead of the suffocatingly safe heritage of the Escuderos.

My trembling hands held up the trophies to the crowd.

"Wild man! Macho! Machote t™uuu!"

The loud yell came from a young woman right in the front row in the shade. A girl of these yeah-yeah times. Her embarrassed friends were trying to shut her up.

Her bold shout, the kind of language that only men were supposed to use, was as shocking to the old folks in the bullring as the "yeah yeah" of rock and roll music that now invaded our borders. The Beatles weren't allowed to perform in Spain, but their smuggled recordings were heard everywhere.

Now the horse-team was skidding that pinto hulk out of the ring. Shortly, in the municipal slaughterhouse next door, a crew of men would hoist it by the hind legs, skin it and gut it, saw it in half along the spine. Tomorrow morning, in the municipal market, butchers would advertise wild bull meat. Bars would offer appetizers to their male customers — bits of fried testicle on toothpicks. A few yeah-yeah women would daringly nibble them.

Behind the barrier, the tanned faces and narrowed eyes of my crew questioned me. Bigotes and Manolillo Vandilaz, brothers in their 30s, two of the best subalterns in the business, failed matadors who were good at rescuing me with their capes. Santi and Fermin, the picadors, just as good in their own specialties — broad faces taut in shadow under their big tasseled hats. Braulio, my sword-man and valet. They could see how I'd strained. Beside them was Isalas Eibar, my manager and lawyer. He was worried too.

Now it was time to make the victory round of the ring.

Jesus, my right leg really hurt. I'd probably pulled a nerve when I extended my body doing that last breast-pass before the kill. In

S&Mac255;cija the horn had entered my upper thigh, torn the artery, penetrated my pelvis, damaged nerves. If Manolillo hadn't yanked off his tie for a tourniquet, I would have bled to death before they got me to the bullring infirmary. People had stood in line outside to give blood — eight transfusions. The fact was, the doctors had wanted to amputate my leg, but I screamed at them and Isalás screamed at them till they gave me a chance. I was in the Sanitorio de Toreros for four months. Then a year of recovery and therapy, even some help from a soccer trainer, to get back in the ring. And the effort to free myself of need for morphine. Even now I sometimes hungered for the white goddess of ease.

So I motioned to Bigotes and Manolillo. When they entered the ring, I put my arms across their strong shoulders. These two subalterns had campaigned with me for 8 years, sat at my bedside, helped me get off morphine. They were like brothers. I loved them the way I never loved my one blood brother. Everyone would think I was honoring them for their good work that day. And I was. But the hug had a second purpose: I could lean on them. Walk, Antonio. One satin shoe in front of the other.

Make the damned leg work.

Slowly we three made our way around the ring, from the shade into the sun. I must have been a sight. The suit of lights was a brand new one from the second-best bull tailor in Spain, costing 25,000 pesetas*. Now it was ruined, streaked with blood. And the right sleeve was absolutely soaked. Everybody likes to see that ejaculation of blood on the torero's satin. Except Braulio — he would have a fit. And he would try to clean it because he knew how short of money I was.

As the municipal band was thumping out "El Macario," I threw the trophies up into the seats. One woman put a bloody ear inside her white silk blouse. A German tourist grabbed the pinto tail out of the air, and got green shit on his hand. Men pelted us with cigars. Bigotes thriftily picked up the cigars. Women tore carnations out of their hair, and threw them at my feet. Manolillo picked them up, and I saluted the crowd with the growing bouquet. Toreros are the only Spanish men who dare to carry flowers in public — any other male would find his manhood compromised by the deed.

Then a pair of dainty lace underpants fluttered down. They landed on the sand, right in front of me.

The entire bullring went into a frenzy of lustful delight. Young women screamed like girls did at a Beatles concert in London or New York. Men howled and pounded each other on the back. Ahead, some of the slaughterhouse crew were standing behind the barrier, bellowing innuendos.

"Ass-tounding!"

"They must belong to a cunt-ry miss!"

"Hey, wild man — let's see you cape with these!"

My fans were careful not to yell the real words. Otherwise the police could grab them. In spite of recent liberalization of our Press Law, you still couldn't say the natural, honest words in public. There were many natural little things that men and women couldn't do, like kiss on the street, the way you could in France or Italy. Even men's shorts were still illegal on the

Spanish street. Perish the thought that some woman — or even some man — would lust after your bare knees.

Here in the bullring, state police were posted, glowering in their grey uniforms, to make sure that no social crimes were committed here. Right now the Greys were squinting around, trying to locate the monster of depravity who'd thrown the panties. Yet we toreros were allowed to flaunt the bulge of our manhood in these skin-tight satin pants of ours.

Now Manolillo bent over, pants creaking. He had gained a little weight in the year I'd been inactive, and we were always afraid he'd burst

his rear seam. Carefully, respectfully, he picked up the panties and gave them to me.

Just then, out of the blur of lewdly laughing men's faces, one of the slaughterhouse men leaned over the barrier.

I noticed him because he was so serious — the only one who wasn't yelling things about the panties. Broad knotted tense shoulders told me he had grown up at hard labor. His bare dirty arm reached out to me, holding a drink in a shot glass. In the shadow of his sunlit blond forelock, his somber blue eyes held mine briefly. Even in my exhausted state, I briefly noticed those eyes. They were blue as wild cornflowers that bloom in summer along lonely Castilian country roads. Yes, he was sad, strangely studying. Envious, maybe. Wishing he was me, probably. I'd seen the look before. I was weary of seeing it.

Then a dark lightning flashed in his eyes, so quickly that only a man like myself could catch it.

Not daring to meet his gaze, I looked down at that powerful naked arm, which was still patiently holding the drink. His skin was nicked by scars, smeared with animal dirt and blood. The veins along his arm were big, like the ones that lace the belly of a large grass-eating animal, a horse or cow.

As I took the glass, our fingers touched. The glass was not too clean, but I didn't care, and swallowed the drink whole. It was orujo, the fiery full-proof stuff made from grapeseed that they drink in these northern mountains. When I handed the glass back, I croaked a thanks.

Then, walking on, I forced myself to do the expected thing with the panties. Tucked them inside my jacket, next to my heart.

Another wave of delighted screams went up.

Some toreros make the crowd scream even louder by kissing those panties that fell from heaven. For me, that was going too far. In these changing times, a classic torero like me was supposed to symbolize a grip on tradition. Strange that I stood for that...because in my heart, I was the king of heretics.

When I got back behind the barrier in the shade, my work was over for the afternoon. The trumpeter blew a fanfare to announce the fifth bull. Fortified by the orujo, I stared through the sweat stinging my eyes, as the bull trotted into the ring.

This one had another set of bananas on his head. The rancher bred them that way, so he could sell bulls to the new wave of sensationalists like Manolo Benítez, who had more flash than

foundation in their art. This bull was not too eager to get his little horn into anything. An under-

age overfed animal who charged nice and straight. Benítez could do all kinds of filigrees with him. Naturally he was dangerous anyway. Even the underage bulls carry chaos inside, and they can kill you if you get careless.

Benítez fell on his knees in front of the charging bull, and whirled the cape over his head. It was a farol, one of his trademark flashy passes. His Beatles haircut whirled with it.

The crowd was primed by his earlier triumph and mine, and they instantly screamed a tremendous OOOOOOOLS&Mac255;EEE! that shook the bullring. Listening to them, one would never know that 30 years ago, this convenient municipal structure had been used as a prison camp after the fall of Santander. Republican prisoners were herded into this very ring, and machine-gunned by fascist soldiers sitting in the seats. Somewhere under the layer of new sand we'd walked on, one could probably still find traces of human blood.

Meanwhile, a few people reached down through the railing to pound my shoulder, congratulate me. If I shook hands they'd feel me trembling. So I kept my back turned to them and stared into the ring. Manolo was on his feet now, doing more flashy stuff, passing the banana at a safe distance. The crowd didn't give a fig — he did it with such explosive style.

My manager slipped me a handkerchief. Now that nobody was watching, I could finally mop my streaming face with it.

"Good work," Isalás said. "Pull yourself together, hombre...you look like a boxer who just got KOed."

His hand gave me a comforting fatherly rub on my back. It felt good through all the silk and gold embroidery. For eight years, this barrel-chested old Basque businessman had been my manager, lawyer and second father. When I'd decided on the bulls, my blood father had found me a relentlessly fascist manager, but I ditched that one for Isalás after my father died. Isalás and his delightful wife Teresa — we called her Tere — were blessedly more liberal. My family despised the Eibars, because they were Basque and came up from nothing — their forebears worked in the sardine fleet.

Isalás could feel me trembling through all the tailored layers of torero flummery. The old man said:

"You just got an offer from the Syndicate. SÚtano's up there in the third row. He sent a message down."

"So the old bastard remembers that I exist?" I croaked.

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see impresario Miguel SÚtano sitting in the second row, smoking a cigar, looking like a dapper gangster in an English-tailored suit that was too tight for him. He was one of the three grandes ...controlled a chain of 12 northern bullrings. But I was strangely unexcited at the offer, and didn't want to be seen gawking at SÚtano like a kid getting his first major contract. So I grabbed the clay jug of water and spewed a stream between my lips, then over my close-cut hair. Northern water, to cool a dried-out man from the south.

Across the ring, the young slaughterhouse guy was standing apart from his covered companions. He was not watching

Manolo's fancy cape-work. He seemed to be looking in my direction. I wanted to grab a lady's fan, and ease my parboiled face with a little northern air. But this would be seen as weakness. People would talk.

Isaías still had his mind on business.

"SÚtano wants you for Big Week in Bilbao," he said in a low voice. "You'll be substituting for Zamora, who's still out with his wound. SÚtano is offering 750. I'm trying to get him up to a mil."

A million pesetas for one afternoon. I had been in the one-million category before, so my comeback was assured. All I had to do now was strain myself more, and more, to keep the momentum going for another 20 afternoons in Spain, plus a few in France and Portugal. Then spend the winter killing bulls all over Mexico and South America. For the first time in my life, that year of future contracts looked terrifying.

"We'll talk about it later," I mumbled.

"Your sleeve, Antonio," came Tere's voice.

. Through my haze of sweat, my second mother was leaning under the railing, holding out her own lace-trimmed hanky. Tere was sturdy and high-busted as the prow of a Basque fishing trawler, her iron-grey hair twisted into a bun. She had tweaked Spanish social dogma by traveling with her husband and helping with his business. She ran his office, kept his books. The couple had no children. How many times I had prayed to the Virgin that, in our next life, Isaías and Tere would have children and I'd be one of them! I had dedicated the pinto bull to the Eibars, so my glittering parade cape was spread on the balustrade in front of Tere.

Tere took my wrist, discreetly wiping a big clot of blood off my sleeve. Her motherly touch steadied me, and my eyes cleared.

Beside Tere sat my twin sister JosÉ, frowning down at me with loving concern. She'd been born first, by five minutes; at moments like these, she always reminded me of her seniority. JosÉ was there in Tere's social lee, chaperoned, like a rowboat tied to that stately trawler.

The fact of chaperonage said much about my sister, baptized Marla Josefina Carmen, known to me as JosÉ. She had declined to be a yeah-yeah girl. There was a difference between being yeah-yeah and just being "modern." JosÉ had grown out of a brief tomboy time, when she shocked the family by wanting to kill bulls like I did, and was now a respected moderna. In a changing Spain where some unmarried girls secretly took the black-market pill smuggled from France, JosÉ had never done the unthinkable — declared her sexual freedom. At 30, she still publicly wore the yoke of upper-class restraint — chaperoned even to mass on Sunday. She talked of marriage, and dated men who were acceptable to the family, boredly entertaining an offer or two...and rejecting them. My mother and aunts complained that Marla Josefina was more finicky about men than they'd ever been. Her Berhayer linen trousers and jacket were safely within the Spanish canons of conservative fashion, considering that in our Mam's eyes, no decent woman wore those foreign things called "slacks". No reek of yeah-yeah scandal had ever trailed in my sister's perfumed wake.

Only I, her twin, knew the untamed tomboy that still lived deep underground inside her, and the restlessness that drove her

lately. To me, she looked like an exiled Egyptian priestess sitting there in a fantastic red wig. Her thick hair was as curly as mine but red — that copper-red Berber hair you still find in Spain, a genetic relic of North African invaders 1500 years ago. Her curls fought the constraints of hairpins, and bushed loose in the humid sea air.

A few years ago, JosÈ started doing moderna things that threw the family into turmoil. She shouted at our mother that she wanted to do something with her life. In defiance of Spanish law, she left our Toledo home still unmarried and went to Madrid to find work. If our father had been alive, he could have had her arrested. As the senior male now, it was my place to stop her, but I didn't.

Next, JosÈ had stepped into one of Spain's most macho professions — journalism. Her pedigree, and some string-pulling by me, got her hired at the monarchist daily ABC. Here, she did another moderna thing, and became the first female bullfight columnist in history. ABC's old columnist had died, and JosÈ submitted samples of her work to the editor-in-chief. It was so good that he couldn't resist. Besides, he was a liberal monarchist who didn't care for Old Catholicism. Having a female reporter was a good way to tweak the nose of the regime.

At first, toreros, managers and impresarios had laughed at JosÈ. But these days they trembled when she sat down at her little Olivetti portable typewriter in her hotel room. JosÈ knew bulls. She didn't need to take bribes because she was already rich. She made open hints about corruption in the fiesta, about horns being "shaved" for some of the yeah-yeah toreros. Best of all, JosÈ knew how to sting with scorpion wit. On afternoons when I was bad, she even stung me. Many people bought ABC just to howl with laughter over her latest barbs. In fact, her willingness to sting her own brother won her a reputation for incorruptible

honesty. By traveling around Spain in company with Tere, whose reputation was without stain, my sister had kept her own reputation shiny.

Right now, JosÈ knew enough to see the strain in my eyes. She leaned under the railing, and I could smell her favorite French perfume, Le DÈ.

"Dig your toes in," she said.

I managed a smile, and squeezed her hand. She had always said this when we were children climbing the mulberry tree by the house, and my fingers were slipping and I was about to fall.

On JosÈ's left, sat Paco, my younger brother. He was 29, slick and slender and excruciatingly well-dressed, with his air of history professor and curator of family glory and his job as secretary to the Minister of Culture and Education. A solid paterfamilias, he was raising his three sons to be as insufferable as himself. Paco was the type of Spanish historian who insisted that the Inquisition killed only a few people. He felt that the patrimony of the Escuderos was wasted on me, and prayed nightly for a bull to kill me so he could step into my shoes. Failing that, Paco wanted me to retire, get married and go into politics.

Now Paco sat edged away from JosÈ, as if he was afraid that her moderna air would rub off on him. He smiled down at me, showing his pointed white teeth, which gave him a ferret look.

"Two ears closer to marriage," he said.

Manolo Benítez' picador was in the ring now, on a well-padded cart-horse. Impassively the big man waited for the charge with lance ready. As the bull slammed against the padding, the picador sank the iron point down into that swollen neck-muscle. Feeling the iron, the bull slammed the big horse against the barrier like it was a feather pillow. As the iron kept jabbing, the bull's rage grew — he might be young and stuffed with corn, but he was truly bravo, and kept fighting the pic as blood bubbled out of his hump.

I remember thinking, at that moment, that you can't cove the wild ones. Neither the wild animal, nor the wild human. No, seÖor. The deeper you push the iron into them, the harder they fight you.

Not too soon for me, the corrida was over. Carrying our parade capes, we three matadors trudged across the ring and out to the gate, amid a final storm of applause and thrown flowers.

Outside, in the shadow of the bullring wall, fans crowded at our cars. The biggest, noisiest crowd jostled the Mercedes sedan belonging to El Cordob s. I saw Manolo's yeah-yeah hairdo go bobbing wearily through the crowd. From here Manolo would go to the airport and his private plane, back to his home in C rdoba. Manolo was the only

torero who could afford a private plane. The rest of us still traveled around the country by car, the old way.

A battalion of Greys stood nervously. Their rubber truncheons were ready to crack skulls. Their eyes shifted this way and that.

These were confusing, volatile times. As a former Republican stronghold, Santander was seething with rumors. The Basque left-wing separatists, the ETA, planned a new bombing to avenge some arrests last week. The Christian Democrats were wringing their hands. A new right-wing terrorist group, the CYS, was forming. Its full name was Caballeros del Yugo Sagrado, or Knights of the Sacred Yoke. The ox yoke was adopted by Fernando and Isabella after their "cleansing" of Spain. They lived by the New Testament teaching "my yoke is sweet." That symbol had been revived by the Falange, our fascist movement, which had controlled Spain since our long civil war broke out in 1936. Now the yoke was CYS. Anything that smacked of foreign ways and foreign immorality was hateful to the CYS. They seemed to be more rightist than the Falange. Judging by their flyers, printed on somebody's old mimeograph and scattered around Santander, the CYS felt that our dictator, General Franco, had gone soft in his old age.

These days, most rumors started with the question "What will happen when He dies?" Franco was old and sick — at public functions his hands trembled and he often nodded off. The rumor was that he might restore the monarchy. Prince Juan Carlos de Borb n might return to the throne. But five centuries of state religion, broken by two short-lived Republics, was finally ending in revulsion against official religion. Many people's patience with the Catholic Church, and its indifference to human rights, was wearing thin now. Since the Civil War, slump in church attendance had been drastic. Spain, it was said, was ceasing to be Catholic. Would our country tolerate a restoration of the throne?

To rescue the situation, Franco and his governing coalition had liberalized a little. Even the Spanish bishops were belatedly seeing that it was time for the Church to lighten up. But demands for faster change were piling up, thunderous as olés — workers, students, women, even outlaw priests. So Franco was clamping down again. Political arrests were up. The trial of leftist leader Julián Grimau had shocked the world. Grimau had been tortured and thrown out of a window before he was finally executed. No matter. The CYS was scattering leaflets announcing their intention to restore Spain to her "primal moral destiny".

"Manolo! Ayyyy, Manolo!" fans were shrieking. Hands jerked the gold tassels from Benítez' jacket.

"Shit...this might get nasty," said Isalás in my ear.

Next to my Cordoban colleague's car was my own dusty black

Mercedes, a 1957 model. Ahead of us was my youngest picador, Santi Hijuelos. Like a bodyguard, Santi used his broad shoulders to bull a path through the mob. Behind me, Bigotes was trying to divert people by giving away the cigars that he'd picked up.

Just as we reached my Mercedes, a man's strong voice at my elbow said, "Antonio?"

I turned. It was that slaughterhouse worker.

The owner of those blue eyes had fought his way out here, to waylay me. Now he was so close at my elbow that I could smell the cheap tobacco of his half-smoked cigarette. He looked to be in his late 20s. He was a few centimeters taller than me — those extraordinary eyes stared straight down into mine. His blunt, open face was not exactly handsome, but its intense expression held my attention. He wore no wedding ring. Probably he helped his father support a large family, and this was his second or third job. Probably he wanted a hand-out. It was not a good moment to approach me, but men who were poor and desperate seldom thought about timing. My valet always had a bank note ready for these moments, and now Braulio pulled it out.

But the slaughterman drew himself up proudly, took the cigarette from his lips.

"No," he said. "I don't want a single peseteca."

He spoke a quaint kind of Castilian, the Montanese dialect of these northern mountains. His race was our northernmost strain, a mingling of Celt and Visigoth. Surely his cantankerous pagan mountaineer ancestors had rolled rocks down on the Arab troops at the battle of Covadonga — and probably a few rocks on Christian troops too. Under his faded beret, that straight hair was the dark gold of ripened cornsilks in his native fields of La Montaña. He had shaved early that morning, but already a bronze stubble glinted on his jaws.

His refusal of money was odd. Probably he was a refugee from some dying mountain village. The kind of rural bachelor who went looking for work in the city and sent most of his pay home to relatives.

Braulio insisted, holding out the bank note. But the slaughterman looked into my eyes with that fierce, anxious stare.

"Antonio, are you all right?" he asked.

Not "Don Antonio." No servility. I liked that. There was a presence, an egalitarian pride, about him. Fans seldom asked me how I was. Usually they wanted to know how much money I made, how many girlfriends I had. This man had seen through the white satin armor. He'd seen the trembling. That's why he offered me the shot of orujo.

Paco and Jos  were heading for Jos 's car. Sant  pulled urgently at my arm.

"Thanks for your concern. Do you need anything?" I asked the slaughterman.

He dragged calmly on his cigarette, hesitated for a beat.

"I need to be a torero," he said.

Most hopefuls were so poor that buttonholing you outside the bullring was the only way they could get to you. Among the thousands of hopefuls, there was always one who had the gift — the one you could train. I'd never had a proteg . Isalas had been urging me to train one before I retired. It was my duty, Isalas said, to make sure there would always be classic toreros.

Suddenly an ugly eddy surged through the crowd. El Cordob s was in his car now, and disappointed fans rocked the vehicle. My party were flung against the side of my Mercedes. I was actually pinned between the slaughterman's thighs, bathed in his smell of bull-guts and sour sweat. His face was against my cheek, close enough for a kiss. My flat-soled satin shoes slipped — the damn things are made to walk on sand, not sidewalks. To keep myself from sliding down between his legs, into the trample, I dropped my parade cape and grabbed him around the waist. He seized hold of my red sash, hauling me back up against him.

No one saw what happened next. It was one of those things between strangers in a puritan country where the state bids to control the smallest sexual urge. Deep in that crush of bodies, his crotch "accidentally" pressed against mine. He was aroused — I could feel it.

Caught by surprise, I felt my own surge. As a Spanish man, I was eternally awake to any chance for sexual larceny. Even in these strange circumstances, my senses responded. A hard-on is painful in those tight satin torero pants. But my hands "accidentally" grasped his hips, holding him hard against me. Under my palms was the hard flex of his buttocks. He caught his breath in surprised excitement.

Then the crowd surged again, grinding us cruelly together. I felt a white-hot pain in the old S&Mac255;cija wound. Instantly my hard-on melted.

"Ayy ...my leg," I gasped.

"Hold on, maj n," he panted. "I'll take care of you."

Bracing his hands against the frame of the car, and his feet against the curb, the slaughterman pressed back as hard as he could. With a fierce protectiveness, he now had me guarded between his arms and his knees. Straining like a weightlifter, he forced a few people back, to open a tiny space around me. Even

so, the crowd pushed him back against me a few more times. His hoarse voice deafened my ear, as he yelled at everyone that I was being hurt. Nearby spectators started helping him push the crowd back. Then Santl, the human tank, surged to our side.

In another moment, a few Greys were there. Batons swung. Heads were bloodied. A couple of unfortunate men got dragged off to the black police vans.

Now the crush eased. As Santl yanked the Mercedes' back door open, the slaughterman pushed me into the car. I hauled him in after me, to make sure the Greys didn't arrest him. Braulio rescued my trampled parade-cape from the pavement and threw it on top of us.

Panting, we all fell in a heap on the back seat.

"Are you all right?" the slaughterman asked.

Majln,** he had called me. It was Montanese for "handsome guy." This slaughterhouse rough had felt me up in public. Majln. Majln. What an adventurer.

"Yes, thanks to you." I was saying t™ to him. "And you?"

Now the rest of the crew piled into the Mercedes. We were a hot male bio-mass of sweaty satin and metal embroidery. Braulio threw the sword-case in the trunk and jumped in. Car-doors slammed shut. Our driver and my crew stared at the slaughterman, who was now staring down at his lap, overcome by sudden shyness. No doubt he was aghast at his impulse in the crowd, wondering if I would have him arrested and charged with an indecent act.

"This guy risked his life for the boss," Santl explained to the rest of the crew. "Antonio was almost squashed like a bug."

As our engine started, the crew grunted their approval of this heroic deed. Isalas reached across Fermin's broad chest and shook the slaughterman's hand.

"To the Roma Hotel," I told the driver. "And drop our friend a few corners away. So he doesn't get nabbed by the Greys."

"Curses on the Greys," Santl growled.

With the police opening a narrow corridor, our car crawled laboriously through the crowd, onto the main avenue.

Briefly I glanced at the slaughterman. Now that he knew I was going to keep his secret, he recovered his composure, daring to lift his head again but not meeting my eyes. His hard profile — keen eyes, good mouth, strong chin — stood out against the welter of torero satin around him. From a face among thousands, this young migrant suddenly shone as an intriguing individual. I wanted to take him back to the hotel with us. Legitimately I could thank him by making him part of my retinue for the evening — taking him to drinks and dinner with us. But that was all I could do. People would talk. Especially in this profession where male adoration of males is stoked to white heat. Every torero is the object of advances from men. I'd had my share of discreet gropes at parties and unsigned love letters.

Talk is a sharper horn than marriage. Liberalization had never dented the core of moral iron that was forged in so many Spanish hearts from birth. People who'd only been to church

twice in their lives would throw rocks at me. Talk could lead to the quiet death sentence of ridicule and loss of my career. Years in prison on some trumped-up charge (since it was tricky to mention maricones in the press, even though vice laws made them criminals). Torture by the police, if political charges could be made serious enough. I knew how the great maricÚn poet García Lorca had died. I knew about that torero that Lorca celebrated in the poem "Llanto." Ignacio Sánchez Mejías was also a maricÚn. Lucky for Mejías that a bull killed him before the Civil War — otherwise somebody would have bullet-holed his bullfighter ass.

So I would give this slaughterhouse guy the hint that every sidewalk hopeful got from me. If he was smart, he'd take the hint and I might get to see him again very soon in the future.

As our car braked at the corner, I said: "Well, good luck in the bulls. Isálas, one of my cards, please, and a pen."

My manager complied. The card bore my address and telephone in Toledo Province. "Your name?" I asked.

"Juan Diano Rodríguez."

On the back I wrote, "Juan Diano Rodríguez is a good man. Do me the favor of helping him in any way you can," and signed it. At the least, it would help him find a better job.

"Will you take some advice?" I asked, handing Juan the card.

"Sure."

"Pick your master carefully. Go ask him if he'll train you. And do it now. Don't wait. You're old to be starting."

"Thanks," Juan Diano said.

Clutching the precious card, he crawled over Fermin's massive knees, and got out of the car.

The car-door slammed. I felt like some bronze cathedral-door of fate had crashed shut on my fingers.

As we pulled away, the young man's blue jumper had already vanished into the dense evening crowd. He would be forging along the sidewalks, putting the card in his pocket — heading back to the big echoing municipal slaughterhouse where six bull carcasses were now strung up on hooks. All I could see now was strolling mothers with baby buggies. Perfectly dressed parents with their perfectly dressed children. Tourists looking lost. Boy-girl pairs walking decorously, not touching hands in public. Two Spanish girls in mini-skirts, leaving a wake of Spanish boys who turned to stare after them and murmur illegal compliments.

"Antonio, you weren't very kind," Isálas grumbled. "You could

have invited the kid to dinner. Good publicity. Fan protects Escudero from mob. Very good publicity."

Isálas was always such a predictable Christian Democrat.

"He looks like he could use a good meal," Bigotes added.

"I'm too tired for publicity tonight," I said, sounding as heartless

as I could.

"He rescued the boss on purpose," Braulio put in dourly. "So he could get to him. He just wanted money."

"No," Bigotes countered. "His deed was genuine. I saw it. He didn't plan for the riot."

As my crew bickered, the Mercedes picked up speed, heading along the harbor drive towards El Sardinero, the ocean-front district where our hotel was. One would never know that, 30 years ago, this harbor lay bombed to ruins by Franco and his Italian allies. Now it was splendidly rebuilt by wealthy commercial families of the city. Cruise ships docked along the waterfront. Yachts were mooring for the night at the Royal Yacht Club. We slowed for happy spectators leaving a soccer match between Santander's Racing and the Royal Madrid.

My head was whirling. What an extraordinary encounter! Yes, Juan Diano hadn't known the crowd would surge. But he'd taken impulsive advantage, like any man in a crowded subway car. He'd pressed himself against me. He hadn't fought to prevent our faces from touching. He had breathed a hot compliment in my ear. Majln. Majln. I could still hear the tone of his husky voice, feel his warm breath against my cheek. How much had he guessed about me? Or was he winging it?

Others had stolen tassels from El Cordob s's jacket. This guy had stolen a feel from me. What a risk he'd run! What a guy!

But he was gone.

"Isa as," I said, "get in touch with the police. See if you can get those three men released. The ones who were arrested at our car. I don't want anything bad to happen to them because of me."

*Juan Belmonte — one of the greatest matadors of all time, active in the ring before the Spanish Civil War.

**Peseta — unit of Spanish money. In the late 1960s, the peseta was very inflated because of rapid Spanish economic development.

*** majo — goodlooking man. Majln (pronounced mah-HEEN) is a typical Montanese variant of this expression.

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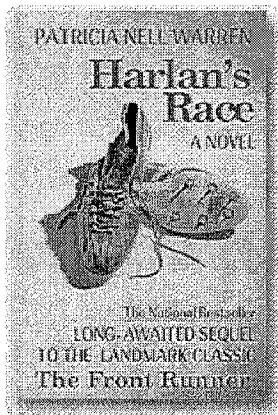
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HARLAN'S RACE - Excerpt

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Chapter One

In the summer of 1990, when I was 55, with so many things coming full circle for me, I went back to New York for the first time in many years. The Gay Games were held there, and I attended - made some new friends, and saw a few of the old ones who were still alive.

"Hi, Harlan, how are you? God, it's been ages. Yeah, we're still together . . . hanging in there. Did you know Justin died? And Chen? So, tell us about you. Got a boyfriend these days? Why the hell aren't you down there in the mile run?"

The usual stuff.

Afterwards I took off alone, and found myself drawn to places where I'd spent the Seventies - that blurred time of my own race through life.

I'd always been one to brood on the past. So that old curve of the American earth called me back, to run down a missing clarity. It wasn't going to be any sentimental journey. More yawned in wait for me than mere years. An era had vanished into a holocaust of time - a present-time version of what people like to see as those sunny ante-bellum days. A point of view had belonged to me, and to other gay men and lesbians, and also to many straight Americans of those times. It had vanished, without our knowing that it was at risk.

In New York City, I felt the first little shocks. The Village was more dangerous and decrepit than ever, with less reason for a dyed-in-the-wool to go on insisting it was the best turf on earth. Many businesses and bartenders and bars and bookstores and coffeehouses that I remembered were gone with the wind. Steve Goodnight's apartment, where I'd faced the end of my coaching career and struggled to become a self-supporting writer, was gone. The old brownstone building, and half the block, had been razed for a new apartment tower.

North of the city, all those green reaches of Westchester County that I'd known so intimately in the Seventies, were patchworked with crass new shopping centers. The campus of Prescott College, where my track team sweated for eight years, was now the corporate headquarters for a foreign company. Those woods where my cross-country runners had hurtled along the trails,

where I'd scattered Billy's ashes in a remote glen, were being bulldozed to make way for split-level ranch houses. Crashes of oak trees hitting the earth seemed almost as jarring as the gun-shot that killed Billy.

But it was on the South Shore of Long Island that I got the biggest jolt.

In the Seventies, the Great South Bay was still clean. Through the inlet, dolphins came roaming in from the sea. In the fall, millions of monarch butterflies migrated through the area, on their way to Mexico. The warm shallow waters offered a feast of clean food - quahog clams, oysters, and blue crabs. Flooding in from the ocean, to spawn, came striped bass and weakfish.

Old-time bay families were known as "bonnikers", and they'd been there forever. Their men and women went out on the water, and hauled in food with no more regulation than a license to dig and a limit on size. Only the first whispers were being heard about hepatitis in clams that were dug near the mainland creeks. You could gill-net a bunch of weakfish, and eat them without a thought.

Now, as I rented a 19-foot bow-rider in the Patchogue marina, I watched the health inspectors tagging every sack of clams that went in the buyers' trucks.

That lovely bay was dying of pollution, and many bonnikers had gone to wherever people emigrate these days. A few diehards were struggling to build a seafood farm modeled on those of Japan. Two bonniker cops I'd known took me to lunch, and asked me if I'd eaten striped bass recently. One cop said you could only eat striper a couple times a year now - too many PCBs in it. And, said the other cop, it tasted "some different".

When I ate my plateful, I agreed.

That afternoon, when I took the rented boat out, a few sights still looked the same from afar. The ferry, an old PT boat, still plowed a white wake across the bay. But up close, the bay was dappled with sarcomas of red-brown algae. Breezes carried a subtle reek of chemicals and sewage. I drove the bow-rider at a low speed, shocked at the emptiness everywhere.

Along the southern rim of the bay, a strip of barrier beach runs for thirty miles. This is Fire Island, the real reason why I'd come here. A place that was a symbol to me - and to many younger Americans who were both gay and straight - of our belief that love and freedom were ours for the taking. I had lived on the east end of Fire Island. From its tidelands noisy with birds, to its clusters of beach houses on stilts, the "Beach" had been as lovely and remote as some South Sea atoll.

Just looking at that long, low Island on the horizon, with its undulating dunes, made me choke on memory. For months after Billy was shot to death, my mind's eye was obsessed with a picture of his body laying dead on that distant beach, where we'd taken so many walks and runs together. Now I could remember him as alive - his strong arms gripping me, his breath warm on my lips, blue-gray eyes holding the cleanness of Atlantic sky. His curls were like the tumbling sea-foam. His torso was sleek as a wave gathering, muscles playing under his skin like a herd of wild dolphins.

Yes, memory does trick us.

As I drove the boat past the tiny Fire Island community of Davis Park, my mind knew that I'd see the changes wreaked by Hurricane Gloria when she ripped through the island in 1985. Yet my brain believed that the little marina of 1976 was still there.

Just west of Davis Park, as my boat engine idled along, my eyes moved unwillingly, aching to the new inlet that Gloria had torn through the island.

Right there, where high tide was falling back through the channel, the beach house called "Hotel Goodnight" had stood. That house was my spiritual home for so many years. The Hotel had been one of the many, many houses of love - my loves, the loves of my friends. The sounds of passionate love-making I could still hear so clearly from its bedrooms. The deep kissings and humpings, the urgent groans of men coupling - were stark in the hot golden air, like dragonflies in amber. Now its broken stilts stuck bleaching out of the sand. A few weathered shingles were still blown across the dunes.

On the raw new beach of the inlet, a dead dolphin lay.

So I cut the motor, and drifted in the silence, staring at that carcass half buried in the sand.

Beneath me, the boat rose and fell gently, humped by the passing swells. On the hot, humid breeze, that stench of the rotting meat drifted to my nostrils. I closed my eyes, and remembered my own war to turn the tide of life, to call it back to me.

That life that was ripped from me on September 9, 1976, at the Montreal Olympic Games. The day that Billy died.

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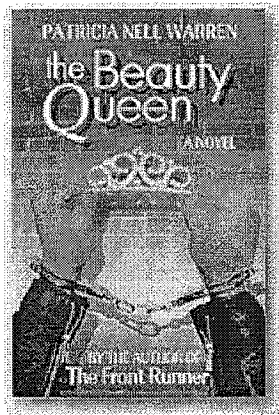
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THE BEAUTY QUEEN - Excerpt



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Chapter One

It was going to be a beautiful June day, Jeannie Laird Colter thought.

Another God-given day for her to pray, and then to agonize about when, and if, God would answer her prayer.

It was one of those summer days in Manhattan when you could sit in a penthouse garden, as she was doing now, and have the illusion that you could see forever; that you could see to the Second Coming, and the fiery end of the world. In reality, the smog had lifted today so that a person could see out across Manhattan to the Jersey flats, and the nearest shores of Long Island, and the green rolling country of upstate New York.

But in this life, things were never what they seemed, were they? God had made the real world, and Satan had made illusions. So a nice day like this had to be one of Satan's tricks. She did not dare put too much stock in this nice day.

Her father's penthouse garden, on top of the high-rise apartment building on East 69th Street, was one of her favorite places, and it certainly did give her a good view of the most amazing and frightening city on Earth.

From where she sat at the wrought-iron breakfast table, toying restlessly with her empty juice glass, she could let her eyes leap along the horizon and see all the great suspension bridges, the Triborough, the Queensboro, the Brooklyn, the Verrazano, the George Washington, even the little Willis Avenue bridge up in Harlem, that linked Manhattan Island's insanities with the rest of the world. Psychiatrists, in their godless and detached scientific way, agreed with believers that big cities like New York were a magnet for psychotics. Sometimes she wondered why she still linked her life with this evil place. Maybe it had something to do with her mother, who had managed to keep her innocence in this valley of the shadow of death.

It was 9 a.m. that summer day. The morning sunlight struck fiery reflections from the windows of tall buildings facing the sun. On the East side the FDR Drive was a river of fire, as sunlight ricocheted off the thousands of cars jammed there. Down in the streets, people teemed like ants; her husband Sidney was down there somewhere, on his way to the New York News building

downtown. And every one of those ant-like persons carried a staggering burden of sin, and had to be saved.

She raised her eyes to the west. Far out in Jersey, where industries dotted the flats, a black column of smoke rose, filling the whole sky there. In reality it was probably a fire at a tank farm, near one of the refineries. But the menacing cloud made her think of doomsday; her imagination swept her closer to it, so that she could hear the rumble of flames and the screams of sinners. Thank heavens this would never happen to her.

"More juice, sweetheart?"

Her father's deep voice broke in on her apocalyptic reverie.

"No thanks, Dad, this is fine," she said, forcing a smile.

"You won't gain any weight back that way," he said.

"Maybe God wants me to be skinny now," she said, giving the smile another try. "Anyway, I weigh the same now as I did when I was nineteen."

Her father returned her fake smile with a real one. Sitting across from her, William Laird was reading Barron's with all the attention that one of Manhattan's biggest real-estate executives would give it. The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal lay, already read and folded carelessly on top of Fortune and Dun1&Mac218;4s, beside his half-empty cup of coffee.

At sixty-one, with a net worth of over forty million dollars (mostly in real estate), she thought, her father could allow himself the luxury of morning coffee, and a 10 a.m. arrival at his downtown office. Bill Laird was not your typical businessman with relentless drive and a cardiac arrest coming up. He knew how to soften up a little and enjoy life—a quality that was somehow un-Baptist and un-Christian, Jeannie thought. Yet she had never actually known him to backslide. He was, well, a gentle and low-key Christian. That was all right, wasn't it?

Her father was dressed up this morning; he was wearing the black pinstriped suit that she had always admired. Often he slopped around the city in old slacks and sweaters with the elbows falling out, carrying blueprints, and his horned-rimmed glasses sliding down his nose, looking half in a dream. His face, still faintly tanned from a week in the Florida Keys a month ago, was lined in all the right places, giving him an air of one of those dignified handsome middle-aged models in the New Yorker ads. Standing six foot one, he had the rugged look and lonely eye of a yachtsman, and in fact he did have a silly thing about the sea.

In a few minutes, he would leave for the office, and then she would have to go home and decide what to do with her day. She would have to sit in her suddenly hushed study, and read what was left of her mail, and brood on all the things still undone.

"You're quiet today," said her father.

Jeannie sighed.

"It's starting to get to me a little," she said. "I really have to get myself together. I pray and pray. I read the Bible like it's going out of style. But somehow . . . nothing happens. That has to be my fault, of course."

Her father put down his Barron's, and refilled his cup from the

sterling antique coffeepot on the table.

"After what you've been through, there's no need to rush things," he said.

She rested her eyes on him thoughtfully. Taking it easy was not really a Christian concept, was it? It was curious that she should find herself questioning him.

"I've drifted long enough," she said, a little sharply.

Her father's frank brown eyes, which had mesmerized so many New York clients and politicians into doing what he wanted, now fixed firmly on her. She found that she could not meet his gaze, and dropped her eyes.

"Sometimes," he said softly, "you think you're drifting. But God sees the river, and all the bends it takes, and the ocean where it's heading."

A rush of warmth went through Jeannie. How could she have doubted her father's faith? She smiled, a real smile this time.

"Now you know why I come trotting over here for breakfast every morning," she said, grinning. "To pick up some crumbs of wisdom from your plate."

Her father threw back his head and laughed his hearty laugh; she had always called it his bear laugh.

"Why don't you come with me today," he said. "Today's the big day we close on the South Street property. Maybe I could tempt you to taste just a drop of champagne with me."

Jeannie considered. The thought of shuffling papers down on South Street, about which her father had talked just a little too much, didn't fit with her doomsday mood.

"Oh, I just feel like being quiet and thinking today," she said. "How about dinner tonight?"

"Not tonight," he said. "I've got a dinner engagement."

"A lovely lady, I suppose?" she said.

She was always jealous that some other woman would replace her mother. God should have put the word "remarriage" in the seventh commandment along with the word "adultery."

Her father laughed again, not so heartily this time.

"No," he said, "a client."

Jeannie shrugged and picked up his copy of the New York Times. She never asked about the clients he had dinner with. They were always dull people who talked about zoning and sewers.

She scanned the front page quickly, expertly. The Times was an infidel rag. But she would have to get back into the old routine of reading it, as well as other papers, and briefing herself on the news. And if things started going well for her again, she'd have aides who would brief her. Good aides were the key to everything these days.

In the lower righthand corner of the front page, there was a modest headline that read, gay rights bill to be revived in city council.

Jeannie knew very well what "gay" meant. And it did not mean "happy."

A slow prickling rush went over her; the kind of rush she thought she might feel if she ever saw Satan face to face. She had the feeling that Satan did not look like the pictures in books; a fierce-looking android with horns and bat wings. No. Satan was legion, the way the Bible said.

He was a mass of lost souls, seething like maggots, as huge and as dead as the moon spinning through space. And many of those lost souls were homosexuals; more and more of them, these days, sucked into that dead mass by the forces of gravity peculiar to their condition; liquor, drugs, the evil dances in their bars, and most of all by their own perverse willfulness to ignore the written Word of God.

Jeannie shook her head slowly. "The homosexuals never give up," she said. "They're starting it again, right here in town."

Her father looked engrossed in Barron's, and for several moments he did not look up. Suddenly he said mildly, "What, sweetheart?"

Jeannie's mind was already off and running.

"The pervert bill," she said. "Councilman Matthews is introducing it again. How that pervert-lover got elected, I'll never know. You know, that's the bill that gives them the right to teach in schools, and live where they please, and so forth."

"Why worry about it?" said her father, burying his face in Barron's again. "It always got voted down before."

"Dad, did you ever knowingly sell a building to homosexuals?" she said.

Barron's came down slowly, and her father stared at her.

"What?" he said.

"Well, did you?"

He put the paper down on the table. "Sweetheart, I don't pry into the sexual secrets of my clients. I'm sure that even my, uh, heterosexual clients have secrets that wouldn't bear examination."

"If every decent person refused to sell to them, or rent to them," she said, "they'd have to leave town. They'd even have to leave the country."

"Sweetheart, many homosexuals aren't identifiable as such. How would you know them?" He sipped at his coffee. "What got you off on this tangent?"

"Tangent?" she said. "This is no tangent, Dad. The sexual perverts never give up. That's the fourth time they've tried to get that bill through the city council." She was still skimming the

article. "It says here that the homosexuals have been lobbying with the unions and the police force and the firemen, and that this time they are optimistic about getting the bill passed, if one can believe the Times."

Her father looked engrossed in Barron's again. But suddenly he said, "They're very stubborn, aren't they?"

"Who? The homosexuals or the firemen?"

"The . . . homosexuals. If only they could be true Christians, they'd be very staunch soldiers for Christ, wouldn't they?"

"Well," said Jeannie crisply, "they'd have to give up their perversions first, and be born again."

Her father was riveting her with his eyes again. "That goes without saying."
Suddenly he smiled. "I haven't heard you use your speechifying tone of voice in a long time. Good to hear it."

"Well, the news item just got me stirred up," she said. "Honestly, I don't know why we go on living in the city. There're so many perverts here that they even talk about the gay vote now."

Her father's smile had vanished perceptibly, as if a cloud shadow had passed over his face.

"If you go back into politics," he said, "you'll have to consider that vote."

Jeannie was sitting bolt upright. "Maybe there is a gay vote. But if that bill was voted on by the people of New York, it'd be defeated by a landslide. All the homosexual lobbying would be for nothing."

Her father was laughing again. Suddenly Jeannie had to laugh, too.

"You think," she teased, "that I am thinking of running for office again, don't you?"

"All I think," he said, "is that my little girl is getting back to her old self again."

He returned to his Barron1&Mac218;4s again. Jeannie went back to her gazing around.

The penthouse garden was a picture of affluent peace and quiet. Graceful white birches, weeping willows and flowering crabapple trees grew in giant granite containers. Along the gravel paths, hybrid tea roses and tuberous begonias spilled their red, pink and yellow velvet flowers everywhere. Near the sliding glass doors of the living room, a moss-stained antique marble fountain dripped serenely into a small pool where a few butter-yellow water lilies floated. Her father had put in the garden two years ago when he moved here. He was so fussy about his garden that every day a greenhouse crew came up to spray or wipe the pollution particles from every single leaf. She loved this garden, and wished her father would never give it up. There was definitely something unstable in the way her father moved all the time.

The morning sunlight came down on her with a peculiar force. She had prayed, and waited for God's call, but He had made her

wait. When He did send her the call, in her mind, she would see plainly that it was His call and not something of her own impatient making.

All during this past year, as she struggled to put her life back together, she had wondered what lay next. The brush with drinking, and the nervous breakdown, and her decision not to run for state senator again, had all made her realize how far she had drifted from the simple faith of her childhood, when her mother was alive to guide her. She had refused to enter a clinic for treatment, because she was afraid it would hurt her political career. Both Sidney and her father had been amazingly understanding and helpful, considering how difficult she had been. And then had come the rush of light, the renewal of faith, the conviction that she had been born again, the offering of her life to Jesus Christ.

Suddenly a thought came flaming down into her vacant mind with the force and light of a meteor.

"Dad, what about politics again?" she said suddenly. "Do you think I have a chance?"

"Why not?" he said, taking out a silver cigarette case, extracting a Camel, and lighting it with his silver lighter.

"I mean," she faltered, "if Nixon could make a comeback . . . and I have a good record. I fought everything in the world. I fought gambling and off-track betting and drugs and pornography and prostitution" She wrinkled her nose at the cigarette smoke.

"You even got the disco across the street closed," said her father.

She smiled. "Don't tease me, now," she said. "I'm very serious. I'm not thinking of running for the legislature again. I'm thinking of running for governor."

Her father put the paper down again. This time she had his full attention. He looked straight at her, and this time she met his eyes unflinchingly.

"Why shouldn't I think about it?" she said. "Heavens, Jimmy Carter's staff seriously considered a woman for vice presidential nominee. There are a lot of women mayors. Men have made such a mess of city politics and state politics that maybe I'd succeed where they failed. Besides, my experience is here, not in Washington. I have an edge over people who have been in Washington and then want to come back and run for governor. Finally! I'm from New York City, so maybe I could end the feud between New York and Albany!"

She leaned back in her chair, stretching luxuriously into the warm sunshine.

"And maybe, after I've been a good governor of New York, I'll think seriously about running for President. You need five of the eight big states, and I'd have this big state right in my apron pocket."

Her father was grinning, showing all his even white teeth. It was the way he smiled when he had closed a big real-estate deal.

Jeannie felt herself sinking down into the sensuous warmth of well-being.

"And I think I'll start my comeback," she said, "by working to defeat that disgusting homosexual bill."

Her father was suddenly looking at his watch, and folding up his newspapers, and sliding them into his black pigskin Gucci briefcase.

"That's an odd issue to make a start with, isn't it?" he said.

"No time like the present," she said crisply. "It's something that's going to be in the news for the next two weeks. They'll vote at the next meeting. The people of the city are going to be up in arms about it. Besides, people know exactly where I stand on every other moral issue. That's the big difference between Jimmy Carter and me. Besides the fact I'm a woman and a Yankee. I've never been the least bit fuzzy on issues."

Her father was looking at her intently as he shut his briefcase.

"No," he said. "That's true. Not in the least."

Bill Laird studied his daughter's face from across the breakfast table. It was a round, soft face, and it was framed, as if in a Victorian watercolor portrait, by the graceful trailing branches of the weeping willow on the uptown side of the garden. But the expression in her brown eyes was anything but soft and sweet.

She had always been like that, ever since she was a little girl. She always knew exactly what she thought and exactly what she should do, and she was far more stubborn and intransigent than the homosexuals she talked about. The one exception had been that period starting two years ago, when the pressures of trying to be a successful wife, successful mother and successful politician had gotten to her. She had faltered, cracked a little like an old building wall from heavy stresses. She had started drinking a little too much—not an alcoholic, mind you, but definitely too much. She hadn't been sick enough to be hospitalized, but she had closeted herself at home, and she had expressed doubts to him that she didn't express even to Sidney.

That strength of hers, that stubbornness, that drive, had always been disturbing. Now he was actually frightened at the way this new resolve might affect his life.

How clearly he remembered her, skipping rope on the sidewalk outside the Good Shepherd Baptist mission on Joralemon Street where her mother had worked long days as a volunteer. She had always brought home A's from school. Then suddenly she was a high school student, queen of the prom, one of the few girls in her class who didn't smoke pot and who wasn't pregnant at graduation time. Suddenly she was a senior with the lead in the senior play, talking about a career as an actress; a nice actress, mind you, like Dale Evans or Debbie Reynolds. Suddenly she was working days as a secretary and going to acting school at night, and he would meet her outside the school to drive her home no matter how late it was. Suddenly she was Miss Subways, and her round sweet face was smiling down from the ad racks on every subway car in the metropolitan area, competing with the cigarette ads and the gang graffiti for the passengers' attention. After that, she was Miss New York, and landed a job in a TV series where she played a very nice nurse. And after that, runner-up to Miss America, and movie actress. She had wanted to make a career in family pictures, and refused to play any sexy roles. But family pictures hadn't done too well, so she finally left acting.

That was when Nixon's 1972 Presidential campaign moved her to get into politics. Besides, her mother had finally made her ashamed of living amid glitter and innuendo.

She brought into politics the speaking skill and the vital presence onstage that she had learned before the cameras and on the beauty-contest runway. From volunteer fund-raising work in New York State for Nixon's campaign, she had risen swiftly to two successful terms in the state senate. She was one of that new race of politicians who were bred in the media, and one of the youngest women state senators in the country. Even now, at thirty-nine, she looked more like twenty-nine or thirty. Even now she was the darling of the New York News, who had loved her ever since the Miss Subways days, for the wholesomeness and innocence of her arch-conservatism. In fact, Sidney, a refugee from the Life staff when the magazine folded, had gotten his first job at the News largely because he was her husband.

Looking at her now, Bill Laird had the uneasy feeling that he had created a beautiful and beguiling monster. And monsters always took a few swipes at their creators before the last reel of the movie.

Of course, he had nothing to reproach himself for. He had lived mostly according to his lights. He had been an attentive and loving father, and he had been as far as he knew a devoted husband to Cora. Even in the business world, he had tried to conduct himself according to the family's Baptist faith, although he was a liberal Baptist and had never really felt born again. He had acquired his modest fortune (modest if you compared him to J. Paul Getty) by shrewd but legal business dealings, and he always paid his taxes.

It was strange to look back over the years and see it all beginning; he with his dad's little real-estate office in Brooklyn Heights, and Jeannie skipping rope in front of the Baptist mission. He could actually sit here on his rooftop, and look down the East River on a clear day, and fancy that he could make out the rooftop that had sheltered their third-floor apartment in that old brownstone shadowed by the Gothic towers of the Brooklyn Bridge.

No, he had not built grandly in that city. He had not raised any World Trade Center on that horizon. But he had saved many modest and beautiful rooftops, for he had pioneered the trend of recycling old commercial and factory buildings and turning them into living space. He had built well and God knew that. Surely he had nothing to fear from God.

But he had much to fear from Jeannie, and this sudden new idea of hers.

At the end of the movie, just in the nick of time, the creator always managed to destroy his monster. But he didn't want to do Jeannie in. After all, how could he?

He got up from the table, zipping his briefcase shut, and forced a smile.

"If I linger any longer with my darling daughter," he said, "I'll be late, and Mrs. Voeller will be mad at me." Mrs. Voeller was his secretary.

Jeannie got up and kissed him softly on his cheek. He kissed her back. "Can I drop anything at the cleaners for you on my way

home?" she said.

"No," he said. "Will I see you this afternoon?"

She appeared lost in thought.

"I miss the children terribly," she said. "And God knows what unholy mischief they're getting into. I might drive upstate and see them for a few hours. Sid and I could come over after dinner, though."

She always talked as if Sidney never had any plans of his own, Bill thought.

"All right," he said. "Drive carefully, sweetheart."

As he strode toward the glass sliding doors of the living room, he thought about the home he was going to make for himself on the South Street property. Soon he could finally move out of this soulless glass apartment tower. All his life he had moved around the city like a nomad, and finally he was going to have a house that was truly his own.

He looked across to New Jersey, and noticed the immense cloud of black smoke for the first time. Fire, he thought, and flinched all over. Right away, the only thing he could think about was Marion pinned in the wreck of the Lotus at Le Mans.

Marion was the "client" he was having dinner with tonight. He wished he was having lunch with Marion instead. Maybe he would call from the office, and try to change their meeting to noon. He was anxious to talk about the new development with Marion, who had colder nerves than he did. Maybe Marion would tell him that everything would be all right.

Far downtown, on Bedford Street, in the west side of Greenwich Village, Mary Ellen Frampton and Liv Lavransson were sitting in their more modest rooftop garden, enjoying a grittier glimpse of the same view.

The old brick tenement was only six stories, but it did give you a peek at the tops of the towers on the Manhattan and Brooklyn bridges, as well as a closeup of the gloomy crowded Wall Street skyline just to the south. As Mary Ellen stirred her instant coffee and added a little more raw sugar, she sadly studied the neighboring rooftops with their crumbling brick chimneys and flues, and their similar efforts at little gardens.

Mary Ellen and Liv had lived on Bedford Street for a year now. The whole building was gay, as were many buildings in this part of Manhattan. All the tenants, both men and women, had worked at fixing up the garden. With the New Yorker's thrift and skill at scavenging, the tenants had found some old unmatching ironwork chairs and a low table, which had been left at various curbs to be carted away. Mary Ellen and Liv had painted the furniture in blue, red and yellow. Barry and Phil, on the fourth floor, had found some old wooden milk-delivery boxes, which now spilled geraniums and petunias brought from the garden shop where Phil worked. Magda, on the second floor, worked in a decorator fabric shop, and had contributed the rainbow-striped canvas, which was now stretched on tall frames around the garden's edge. The frames cut off the depressing view of the nearby tarpaper roofs, with their dust, pigeon shit and broken glass. Even Jerry, on the ground floor (though he was a little richer than the other tenants and had his own tiny back-court garden) had contributed an extra garden hose, and

everybody used it to water the flowers and keep the dust sprayed off of them.

Barry and Phil had just left for work, clattering off down the stairs, so Mary Ellen and Liv were left to enjoy the rooftop morning by themselves.

Mary Ellen had been enjoying it, till she picked up her Times and saw the article about the gay rights bill.

It was an exercise in futility, she thought the bill would get voted down again.

She slumped back into the blue ironwork chair and stretched out her long lean legs in their ripped-off denim shorts and blue sneakers. She was off duty today, so she wouldn't have to pull the hot blue uniform pants up over them. She and Liv had picked this apartment because it was close to the Twelfth Street post office where Liv worked as a mail sorter. It was also comfortably far from the boundaries of her police precinct on the East Side, where Mary Ellen was known as Sergeant Mary Ellen Frampton, AKA "Sarge" and "Cuffs." Her .38 Smith and Wesson service revolver and her smaller off-duty handgun were downstairs in the bedroom drawer.

The two of them had lived together for over two years now, and Mary Ellen was always amazed at how loving someone got better and better. Right now, the only thing wrong with her life was that she couldn't be open with her superiors about being a lesbian, and that she was not officially welcome in the American society whose law and order she had formally sworn to help uphold. That was a large thing to be wrong in her life.

She had met Liv while still a rookie. She was on a weekend upstate with three other women, visiting a woman who had a lovely old house in Rhinebeck overlooking the Hudson. That morning, Mary Ellen had gone out to get a gallon of milk, and Liv had come striding up the shady street, carrying her heavy mailbag like it was nothing. Her uniform was crisply pressed. Her mailperson's visored hat set off her baby-blue eyes and her white-blonde hair in its strict little bun. Her sweet Scandinavian face with its china-white skin was trying hard to tan.

The mailperson swiftly looked Mary Ellen up and down with a look there was no mistaking.

By the time Mary Ellen was able to get her breath back, Liv had gone striding on up the street.

But the next morning, Mary Ellen waylaid the smiling young mailperson and struck up a conversation. This led to her contriving to be invited to Rhinebeck another time.

She learned that Liv had come to the United States as an exchange student in psychology, decided to stay, and become a citizen, but had been unable to get a job because of over-crowding in her field. She was staying in Rhinebeck with an aunt and uncle, also Swedish-born, who were good somber churchgoing Lutherans. She was neither butch nor femme, but a kiki, in her naturalness and dislike of role-playing. And Mary Ellen, under her own uniform, was also a kiki.

One thing led to another, and Liv left her quiet upstate town and moved to New York with Mary Ellen. There, she found the U.S. Post Office unwilling to put her on the street as a mailcarrier again. So she took the next best thing, working on the noisy

high-pressure mail sorter. Mary Ellen was so dizzied by love that she barely passed her exam for sergeant. Liv and the police force; they made things almost perfect. Mary Ellen loved her work on the force with a passion that was almost physical. As a rookie she had made her mark—her first arrest was eight white males with a stolen car and drugs. She had handcuffed the boys in pairs and brought them all in. In court, as each perpetrator admitted that he, too, had been arrested by Police Officer Frampton, the judge was unable to suppress a smile. After that, Captain Bader had nicknamed her "Cuffs." She had never yet killed a person in the line of duty. Police Commissioner Benny Manuella had told her that she was one of the main reasons why he had (grudgingly, of course) changed his mind about putting women officers on the New York streets. Mary Ellen liked to remember that moment in the PC's office, and how she had nearly burst with pride. Too bad her dad was no longer alive, to be proud in his own way. It would have made two generations of police sergeants in the Frampton family.

But now Mary Ellen sat frowning at the New York Times, and some of the pleasure was going out of her day. "Law and order," she thought. "Oh, how I believe in that. But law and order doesn't include me and Liv. On me and Liv, it's open season. It's a person-hunt."

Sitting on the other side of the table, Liv was fluffing her long hair out in the sun, drying it after her morning shower. The hair dryer was going, with the extension cords that led down to an outlet in the apartment; that hair dryer that, often at night, wore ribbons and feathers and became an instrument of love. Liv was a fanatic about cleanliness, and showered and dried her hair two or three times a day.

"What is it, Mary Ellen?" she asked.

Liv was so sensitive to Mary Ellen's moods that Mary Ellen often had the sensation that her thoughts were being read. This was usually a nice sensation, not at all scary. But today, somehow, it gave her an eerie feeling. She recognized that someday, she might think a thought that she'd want to hide from Liv.

Instead of answering, Mary Ellen tossed the paper across the table, making their tabby cat, Kikan, jump down. She pointed at the article.

Liv studied it briefly, then shrugged.

"Someday it will pass," she said in her soft, correct, accented voice.

"I'm not so sure about that," said Mary Ellen.

Liv picked Kikan up and the cat relaxed in her arms. Kikan, too, had been scavenged off the street as a starving kitten with huge eyes and legs like toothpicks. Now she was a great solemn adult mackerel tabby. Liv loved cats fiercely, and always said that they were aloof because "they know most people believe cats cannot show love, and they don't want to exert themselves."

"But it is a question of the Bill of Rights, no?" said Liv.

"Most Americans interpret the Bill of Rights as applying only to themselves personally," said Mary Ellen, just a little bitterly.

"But so many American cities now have such a bill, no?" said Liv.

"Sure," said Mary Ellen. "But now the backlash is starting. We'll have to fight like bastards just to defend those laws. Those laws can always be repealed, you know."

She sipped at her coffee slowly.

"It's ironic," she said. "When the force sends me out on the street, they give me a gun, right? If some person tries to blow me away, I can blow him away." She said this reminding herself that, as yet, she had never killed another human being. "But supposing some perpetrator tries to blow me away on the moral plane, right? Not take my life, but take my dignity and my career and my money and maybe my lover, too, right? And I can't do anything. I'm supposed to turn the other cheek. I'm supposed to be like a lamb led to the slaughter."

Liv's eyes were shadowed with pain. She had absorbed much of the somber steady churchiness of her family, and on coming to New York had gravitated to the Metropolitan Community Church on Seventh Avenue, as there was no gay Lutheran church group in the city yet. Mary Ellen, for her part, had retained much of her family's somber Presbyterian faith, especially that of her father, though she wasn't as churchy and spiritual as Liv. The two women's strong belief in their own dignity had led them, quite naturally, to attend the MCC's gay worship services.

But Liv's answer was not a theological one, but a practical one.

"Mary Ellen," she said, "if you think so much about this, you will go crazy."

"I know," said Mary Ellen. "I know."

They sat silent for a moment. Mary Ellen's eyes drifted along the Wall Street skyline, and noted the great black smoke haze rising over New Jersey. An oil fire, she thought. Part of her mind was instantly in her cruiser, taking the radio run, tearing along the streets at Code One speed, responding to such a scene. Part of her was directing traffic at the fire, assisting firemen, helping injured people, holding back crowds.

"You know," she said, "it's incredible that no lesbians ever get really violent about this. Or gay men either, for that matter. I mean, really violent. Not just yelling and demonstrations and stuff."

"What do you mean?" asked Liv suspiciously.

"I mean, straights get violent with us. Straight gangs beating up gay people coming out of bars. And all the quiet violence, like firing us from jobs, and not giving us insurance. And all the verbal violence. Calling us human garbage, and so on. And we yell a lot, and we march, and we write letters to the editor, and we take out our hostilities by fighting a lot among ourselves. But we don't hand that real violence back."

Liv shrugged. "God says not to kill," she said. "Just because they kill doesn't give us the right to kill. Why should we stoop to be on their level? We should be better than they are."

"That's true," said Mary Ellen. "All I'm saying is, sometimes I'm surprised that gays don't go bananas and take a little revenge."

Liv was looking straight into Mary Ellen's eyes. "That is very dangerous thinking, Mary Ellen."

Mary Ellen flushed a little. She was not even sure why she was flushing. But she felt curiously like a little kid caught beforehand, in the pre-meditation of doing something naughty. In fact, she didn't even know what that naughty thing was. Liv had divined the thought, whatever it was, before she herself had thought it.

"I'm not thinking anything," she said. "I'm just saying that I'm surprised I never catch a squeal to go to such and such a block, and some gay perpetrator is sitting on the roof playing sniper because she or he's fed up. With all the fed-up homosexuals in this town, you'd think it would happen all the time. But it doesn't."

To cover her mysterious embarrassment, she got up to water the plants.

Very industriously, she turned on the faucet and started to spray the geraniums gently. It made Mary Ellen feel a little better, washing the city pollution off the flowers.

But Liv wasn't through with her yet. With Kikan now sleeping in her arms, she looked at Mary Ellen as steadily as a clairvoyant and said, "Tell me, Mary Ellen, looove. You have the pistol downstairs. When you lose control, who will you shoot first?"

Mary Ellen stopped dead with the garden hose in her hands. The stream wet the striped canvas screen behind the geraniums. She stared at Liv, shocked out of her mind.

"Are you crazy?" she said. "Me lose control?"

Then she recovered herself, on seeing a mischievous sparkle in Liv's blue eyes.

"Well, let's see," she said. "Uh, I'd have to make a long list. Who would I shoot first? I dunno. But I'd go down the list one by one."

Mary Ellen scratched her head, burlesquing the moment with an attempt at low comedy. She stood pigeon-toed, and let the hose spray on her sneakers. Liv started to giggle.

Suddenly Mary Ellen swooped at Liv, yanked her up out of the red iron chair and hugged her, lifting her right off the deck. This was no easy feat, because Liv was as tall as she, five foot nine and weighing 135 pounds. Liv screamed with laughter and let the cat fall gently from her arms. Mildly offended, Kikan stalked off and sat in the shade of the geraniums. Then the two women stood hugging each other, a lesbian hug, breasts between breasts, groins grinding softly, as they rocked warmly back and forth.

"I do not think," said Liv, "that we should spoil our day off by planning assassinations."

They held each other's faces, and gave each other a kiss on the lips.

"Neither do I," said Mary Ellen. "How about something special for breakfast? Strawberries are forty-nine a pint at Gable's."

Jeannie Colter strode out of the elevator, carrying her mail. Her heeled patent-leather sandals clicked on the marble floor of the tiny fifth-floor foyer. She unlocked the door of her apartment.

It was that rare thing; a sunny New York apartment. The beautiful old building on East 68th Street was tall enough that it rose above its relatives, and it was narrow. So the windows on both sides of the big living room poured in sun all day long instead of giving a closeup look at the dingy brick wall of the next building. She had bought the apartment after she and Sid got married, with a tax-free money gift from her father, and Sid had said he liked it okay.

Now the sun slanted in strongly from the east, across the sofa and chairs upholstered in a prim brocade of tiny flowers. An antique American china clock sat ticking on the mantel of the green marble fireplace. By the windows stood Sid's contribution to the room (several huge plants that he had bought at Terrestri's) ferns, palms. Jeannie hated potted plants, because they were always dropping dead leaves on the floor. But she had decorated the room, so she had to let Sid have something, at least.

Her tall antique secretary desk stood against the north wall, beside the sofa. Moving with swift ease, she sat down on the plain Shaker chair, and sorted through her mail. Usually her aide, Gertrude Utley, did it. Gertrude still came up for a few hours a week, usually in the morning. But today Jeannie was looking for something specific. The usual - fan letters, bills, letters requesting political support, junk mail addressed to occupant. Her small neat well-manicured hand ripped open the envelopes, jerked out the letters, tossed them impatiently aside when read.

Just what she'd been looking for: three invitations to speak. For months now, she had refused all such invitations. But now she needed one that would provide the perfect occasion for the speech she wanted to make - the speech that would launch her comeback.

Then she picked up the little white Trim-Line phone and punched the musical numbered buttons.

"Mrs. Haley? This is Jeannie Colter, calling about your invitation. Oh, why, thank you. Yes, of course . . ."

Mrs. Haley's voice bored in her ear, apologizing for the last-minute nature of the invitation. They had invited someone else months ago, and the dignity had been taken ill.

"That's quite all right," said Jeannie. "I happen to have the date free, and the Y.W.C.A. has always been very close to my heart."

When she'd hung up, she sat thrilling in every nerve with a strange excitement.

Events had been set in motion. All she had to do now was write the speech, and of course discuss it with Tom Winkler, her old campaign manager, and with Reverend Irving too, and her father and her other advisers. The News would cover the opening of the new Y.W.C.A. in Queens, of course, and Jeannie would contact her old PR man to stir up the other media. A week from now, her name would once again be all over the newspapers and the TV news.

A few minutes later, she was striding out the door again, a little silk plaid scarf tied over her hair, dark glasses in place. Her heels clicked more purposefully than ever on the marble floor, and her car keys jingled in her hand.

It was a beautiful God-given day, and her children had better be angels, up there in the country.

Bill Laird was telephoning, too. He was behind the massive captain's desk in his office on Canal Street. His face was set as he dialed the familiar numbers. As he waited for the call to click through, he was so tense that he didn't even doodle on his memo pad.

"Rolls-Royce, good morning," said a female switchboard operator voice.

"Marion Rhodes, please," he said.

Another click, then the so-familiar English voice.

"Rhodes here," said Marion.

"Hi, it's me," said Bill. "Are you free for lunch today?"

"Afraid not." A slight pause. "Is it important?"

"Yes."

"I can cancel then." Another slight pause. "You sound rather upset."

"I am. It's Jean."

"Oh dear. Not drinking again, I hope?"

"No, nothing like that. I'll tell you at lunch."

"All right. The usual?"

"Twelve-thirty, at the Sumptuary," said Bill.

Mary Ellen and Liv were walking along Christopher Street, arm linked warmly through arm. Since they were in the West Side gay ghetto, no one even so much as glanced at them—people just brushed by.

Walking arm in arm was a reckless thing to do.

The two women had just browsed through the streetside vegetable market, Gable's, and had lingered lovingly over the display of melons, artichokes, even sun-ripened tomatoes. Liv was wearing faded jeans, huaraches and a plaid Indian cotton shirt, and carrying a brown paper bag with two pints of strawberries in it. Mary Ellen was wearing brown slacks. Inside the pant leg, strapped to her ankle in its small neat holster, was the short-barreled .32 automatic that she was required to carry off duty, in case some emergency might require her to act as a police officer. But, devoted as Mary Ellen was to her job, she liked to draw a fine clean line between her on-duty self and her off-duty self. Here in the West Village, far from the boundaries of her East Side precinct, she could be herself.

Mary Ellen had always worried a lot about running into police officers from her precinct while she had her arm around Liv. Only three of her colleagues knew she was a lesbian. One of them was her partner, PO Danny Blackburn, who was gay himself. She knew about PO Blackburn because she had run into him at a Metropolitan Community Church coffee hour. Their first

reaction to each other was deep suspicion (each thought the other could be a "shoofly," or police internal-security agent). Then after a little spirited kidding around during which they threatened to bust each other on moral charges, there was a tacit agreement to keep each other's secret. Danny became her partner on patrol. With time, Mary Ellen grew to feel a deep bond with Danny. He was like a kid brother and she had never had a brother. He was among the very few men that she and Liv knew well and trusted, and invited to their home for socializing.

Now Mary Ellen and Liv strolled west on Christopher Street, looking into the windows of shops, admiring a book cover here, a leather vest there.

"You like that, huh?" said Mary Ellen.

"I loooove it," said Liv. She had a way of saying loooove that always tore at Mary Ellen's heart. "It is Kikan, no?"

"Sure looks like Kikan."

"It knew I would be walking by," said Liv. "It was in another store, and it flew here so I would see it."

They went into the shop. A few minutes later, they came out again. The painting was circa 1800, and the shop owner wanted \$750 for it. Liv had a small tear in her eye, and she looked at the painting again before they walked on.

Mary Ellen hugged Liv against her side, trying to comfort her.

"Someday we'll be filthy rich," she said, "and I'll buy it for you. Because at the price that perpetrator is asking, it's still gonna be there ten years from now."

She hoped that no shoofly had seen her hug Liv. But life wasn't worth living if you had to be that scared.

At the station house, she had cultivated the image of a super-cool young woman who gave her all to her job and didn't entertain at home. The straight officers had never visited her apartment, and they knew only that she lived with another working girl (a thing so common in New York that it didn't arouse suspicion in itself). On top of that, she and Danny let them think that they were dating each other.

Often the two of them were convulsed with laughter when the men in the locker room and the women at desk jobs hinted fondly that they were waiting for wedding bells to ring for PO Frampton and PO Blackburn.

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